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THE
SUBSTANCE OF THREE SPEECHES,

&c. &c. &c.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]



THE
SUBSTANCE
OF
THREE SPEECHES,
DELIVERED IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS OF IRELAND,
February 6, March 4, and March 21, 1800,
UPON THE SUBJECT OF
AN UNION WITH GREAT BRITAIN.

BY R. L. EDGEWORTH, Esq.
F. R. S. AND M. R. I. A.

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1800.



THE
SUBSTANCE OF THREE SPEECHES, &c.

SPEECH I.

*In the Debate on the Lord-Lieutenant's Message,
respecting an Union between Great-Britain and
Ireland, Feb. 6, 1800.*

SIR,

A MAN who is totally unconnected with any party in this House, rises to deliver his opinions under a very considerable disadvantage; he is certain that his errors will meet with no indulgence, and that whatever he may say favourable to the opinions of any description of gentlemen in this house, will obtain him but a slender share of their support, as it is not advanced to strengthen their party. His motives also are sometimes sus-
B pected;

pected; he is supposed to wait for terms on the one side, or to fear loss of popularity on the other. I have, Sir, notwithstanding these discouragements, steadily abstained from deciding upon this subject, till I had heard the terms of Union, which were to be laid before this Parliament. At the commencement of the last session, I declared myself, in general, disposed to a Legislative Union with Great-Britain, but I at the same time voted against the immediate adoption of the measure; I wished that it should be laid before the people of this country, for their cool and dispassionate investigation; and I at the same time declared, that I never would concur in forcing it upon the people, by mere Parliamentary majorities. I trusted, that when the first feelings of national pride had subsided, the good sense of the nation would adopt the measure, if it appeared decidedly beneficial. I waited patiently till the terms of the measure came before the House, and I was conscious, that I might trust myself till that moment should arrive, as I had no ambition to gratify on the one side, and as I knew how to appreciate the value of temporary popularity on the other. Not even you, Sir, to whom I have always looked up with the highest deference and respect, could predict the manner in which I shall give my vote on the present question; for, Sir, it was not decided when I came within these walls.



At

At this late hour, I will not detain the House long upon those points which have already been so ably and so amply discussed, but I shall endeavour to mention a few ideas that have not yet been laid before you, and I shall hope for the indulgence of the House, not from any expectation which they can have of hearing eloquence from my lips, nor of having any of their passions moved by what I shall say, but from my being content to address myself to your sober reason. I leave to gentlemen of superior attainments all “the pomp, pride, and circumstance,” of Parliamentary warfare, which makes ambition virtue: Sir, it is urged, that this measure is an innovation: if it be hurtful, reject it; but if it be beneficial, do not resist, merely because it is an innovation. Was not the Reformation an innovation? Was not the glorious Revolution, which placed the present family upon the throne, an innovation? Was not the Octennial Bill an innovation? Was not the Settlement of 1782 an innovation? And surely it will be allowed that this was a beneficial innovation. Much commercial advantage has certainly arisen to this country, from the arrangement of 1782, and I agree entirely in the opinion that it was intended to be final, and no Jesuitical, mental reservation could make it otherwise. But final as it was meant to be, it was far from perfect. The power, the *independent* power, for such I am taught to say, of the Irish

Parliament, did not prevent the late rebellion. Notwithstanding the admirable vigilance and loyalty of the members of the House, did not the safety of this country depend upon the compunction of a single individual?

“ What once was called a blessing, now is wit,

“ And God’s good Providence a lucky hit.”

But allowing to the Settlement of 1782, all the extent of advantage which is attributed to it, was not that Settlement made by Parliament? Who can then doubt the competency of Parliament to make changes in the Legislature of the kingdom, when the whole constitution of Parliament was changed by that very Settlement? If that Parliament was authorised to make an agreement useful to Ireland, so must the present Parliament. Some gentlemen will reply, that Parliament may negociate for what may be advantageous, but cannot surrender the rights or liberties of the people; to this I entirely accede; and here lies the fallacy of the argument against the competency of the Parliament: It is first assumed that an Union is a dereliction of the rights and liberties of the people, and then it is asserted that Parliament is incompetent to make such a surrender: prove the first position, and the conclusion must follow; but do not attempt to prove it by saying, that any deviation from the Settlement of
1782,

1782, is impossible; our Parliament surely, has neither lost the power of doing good, nor the power of distinguishing good from evil.—We are fond of imitating the British Constitution; ours is but an imperfect imitation of it, but instead of an imitation, we may have the original; for the defects of our present Constitution, without an Union, no remedy is immediately in our power; we have, therefore, a right to improve our present Constitution, by the means that are within our power, by indentifying it with that of England. It is said, that 100 Irish Members, added to the British Parliament, would render it more dependant on the Crown. I cannot implicitly agree to this position. It will, I believe, be granted, that the Members chosen for counties and cities, are the most independent, and the least liable to corruption. There may be exceptions to this rule undoubtedly, but as a general principle, it will be admitted by both nations.

Let us then suppose that there are from 80 to 90 county and city members in the Irish House, out of 300, and in the British Parliament, 180 county and city Members, out of 554. In the one House, there is not nearly a third—in the other House, not exceeding a third, composed of county or city Members, but in the United Parliament, the proportion would be materially altered; instead of there being one-third or three-

ninths composed of county and city Members, here would be four-ninths, which is nearer to one-half than to one-third. It will be a further advantage to have the 100 new members from Ireland, rather than from English counties, where established families would have too great an increase of influence. Would to God, the English Minister would seize this favourable opportunity of making a salutary reform in Parliament, with the least possible inconvenience, by lopping off 100 English borough Members; there would then be a considerable majority of county and city Members in the united Parliament. This would indeed, fulfil the wishes of his father, and he must thus pour better blood into the veins of the British Constitution, whilst an equal quantity of what was corrupted, was drawn out by another channel.

We should also consider the support which we should receive from the influence in the British Parliament, of those gentlemen of property, whom we are in the habit of reprobating as absentees.—Will the name of absentee prevent a man from attending to the interests of his own property, though it be divided from him by 10 or 20 leagues of sea?—It is not matter of much astonishment, that those gentlemen who have property in both countries, should prefer a country where that property is secure, to this country,

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where every breeze shakes us like a tempest.— I make no doubt that security would induce many who have not hitherto come amongst us, to temporary residence, with a view to improve their estates in Ireland, and when once the country is in a state of permanent security, may it not be expected that younger branches of opulent families may represent ~~them~~ in this country, to manage, and perhaps to inherit their family estates.

But let me not be misunderstood; I do not wish to curtail the influence of the crown too much; boroughs I know introduce talents into Parliament:—their activity, like the winds, impel the vessel of the State. They are necessary to its motion, though sometimes they burst out in tempests and hurricanes; in such moments, the weight of landed property is the ballast which prevents the vessel from oversetting.—I am far from wishing to exclude from their just share of parliamentary power, such talents as we have lately seen displayed in this House, and I earnestly hope, that in the united parliaments they may appear to the honour of their country.

I am sensible that when I speak of the addition of an hundred Irish Members as advantageous to the freedom of the United Parliament, I open a large field to declamation. The Scotch Members will be instanced against me, and I shall be

reminded that they are supposed to have added a uniform weight to the influence of the Crown. But the Irish do not, like the Scotch, habitually unite for their common interest, when they are out of their own country. Is this propensity attributed to the Irish? On the contrary, are they not continually reproached with neglecting in another country the interests of those whom they have left behind them. It is said that the Irish fight better when abroad, than when in their own country; perhaps their civil courage is of the same nature as their military prowess, and that they will contend more strenuously against ministerial encroachment in the united, than they have been used to do in the separate parliament of Ireland. The splendid examples of a Barré, a Burke, and of a Sheridan, have proved that Ireland produces every species of genius; and we shall, I hope, send to the united Parliament no inferior specimens of the abilities of Irishmen.

It is said that your Representatives will be at too great a distance from controul. They will be at a greater distance, but they will be more liable to controul; for if they take places, they must vacate their seats, and some popular candidate will always be at home endeavouring to supplant them. Distance in this case far from weakening the popular power, obviously tends to weaken the force of aristocratic influence in elections.

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It is said that a distant Parliament cannot know the local advantages of plans of improvement. Plans of local improvement which are suited to our circumstances, seldom fail to meet with encouragement, independent of Parliament. For instance, roads are managed by grand juries, and canals will always find companies to carry them on, where they are advantageous. In one word, distance need never be inconvenient, where *proper means of conveying intelligence* are established.

It has been ably argued by an honourable Member (Sir Lau. Parsons) that the horrors of the Revolution in France might have been prevented, if the French gentry and nobility had been in the habit of residing upon their estates, and keeping up a connexion with their tenantry. But there are reasons why Ireland would not be liable to suffer as France did from the absence of the proprietors from their estates. Let us recur to our own experience—Is it thought that the expenditure of resident gentlemen is of great service?—I compare two neighbouring counties of which I happen to have the most intimate knowledge, in one of which there are resident twenty or thirty gentlemen of upwards of 2000l. per annum; in the other there do not constantly reside four gentlemen of that description; yet I do not see that the one county exceeds the other four or five times in wealth or industry—Smith truly remarks
that

that the residence of an opulent family is sometimes injurious to industry.—One manufacturer is worth more than twenty squires—I mean of such squires as myself. Formerly some grim Baron retained in profuse hospitality a number of idle dependants—such things happen every day under new names—I mean no disrespect to the body of country squires, of which I am one—a country squire may be of great use as an upright, independent magistrate, or as an excellent farmer—But for the former occupation, government has found substitutes; and that part of a country gentleman's utility is superseeded. Husbandry is the remaining source of utility, and this will, I make no doubt, become a more general occupation, when gentlemen of moderate fortunes, by an Union, shall lose *this* fertile field of political cultivation, which has hitherto lain open to them in this House.—Then they will naturally become improvers of their native soil.—What I contend against is, the necessity of having *all* the opulent gentry of Ireland resident. On the contrary, the parliamentary visits of a hundred of our opulent gentry to England will increase the intercourse and family connexions between the two countries; and from this intercourse, advantages far overbalancing the evil of their temporary absence must result. All our improvements are introduced by those who have been temporary absentees—but when we talk of absentees, we are often governed

verned by prejudice against the name; and we shall consider that when the two countries are one, the term *emigration*, when we speak of the residence of the Irish in England, will be absurd.—There are some who imagine that the want of the consumption of the additional absentees will be felt by the grazier and the ploughman. It would not turn the balance in the estimation of a single hair.

I am willing to allow, that in this city undoubtedly one source of traffick will be dried up; but will not increased habits of parsimony and attention to business balance the loss?—Tradesmen copy those whom they serve. A taylor and a milliner are generally extravagant; a wholesale dealer generally provident.—Dublin, as a *commercial* city will, in all probability, be in twenty years a richer city than it could be as the seat of vice-regal magnificence. The gentry of the country will be inclined more to œconomy, when they are not necessarily assembled every year in Parliament; and from their example, perhaps, similar habits may arise amongst their immediate inferiors.—Smith says truly, “capital is produced more by parsimony than by industry.” Gentlemen who are fond of recurring to precedent should recollect that Edinburgh had little trade before the Union, and this was ascribed by one of the ablest political writers of Scotland, to that city’s being inhabited

inhabited by Members of Parliament and idle gentry, instead of being inhabited by industrious men of business.—A similar observation he extended to France. The Parliament towns of France were the seats of idleness and poverty. Parliaments, tho' certainly oracles of wisdom, have not, it seems, the power of conferring wealth. Even oracles themselves have not this power. If history informs us truly, the people and the country in the neighbourhood even of the famous oracle of Dodona were wretched in the extreme.

But to be serious, I have no doubt that Dublin will gain in trade what she loses by the residence of the Parliament—at all events Dublin, though a great, is not our only object. If the country flourish, wealth may fluctuate from one seaport to another, without creating any alarm to the real politician. Whilst the stream of commerce flows through the island, the Legislator need not be disquieted by the shifting of the golden sands.

But, Sir, an Union need not be resorted to for the improvement of our commerce. (Here the opposition cried hear him, hear him)—I repeat it, Sir, an Union need not be resorted to for the improvement of our commerce.—I am glad, Sir, that I have been able to obtain the attention of
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this side of the House, I perceive many gentlemen awake, who were just now asleep—I know, Sir, that my arguments are of little weight; but my vote is of some consequence—and, as I do not wish to enflame any dangerous passions, I may be allowed to endeavour, by the stimulus of curiosity, to catch the attention of the House.—And now, Sir, I must continue to touch upon the true cause of that necessity which calls upon us for some strong measures to restore us to security.—Religious dissensions are the real cause of all our evils: gentlemen are afraid to touch upon this subject; but when affairs are in a bad situation, that situation must be looked in the face—our wounds must be probed, not to torture but to heal. I will not enumerate the horrors on either side—they are not peculiar to the year 1641 or 1798—but are necessary consequences of bigotry and superstition—ignorance is the cause of both. The Minister is charged with bribing priests—a harsh name may be given to any species of conduct—raising the wretched Roman Catholic priests from sordid penury and more sordid ignorance to some species of independence, is the wisest measure Government can pursue; had it been pursued seven years ago, there would have been no rebellion. Render priests totally independent of their miserable flocks, and they will not be obliged to keep them in ignorance. The reign of that species of popery, which
was

was injurious to mankind, is over.—I do not wish to speak of the Papists of the present day; but the popery of the present day is a lion robbed of his teeth and claws—it will expire from necessary causes in a short time—and the less it is stimulated, the sooner it will fall into neglect—the sun of reason has ascended too high to be followed by the mists of ignorance; let it shine on Ireland, and popery is no more.

Sir, in a state of health, strict adherence to any rule is not necessary; mankind is nourished by various aliments, and can acquire habits of assimilating the most opposite modes of life; but when individuals or states become diseased, they must submit to strict regimen. Could it be possible to allay religious feuds, Ireland would not accede to, nor would England press an Union; but it is impossible. Last session convinced me that the acrimony which rankled in men's minds has not been corrected. I do not weakly imagine that a Roll of Parchment, called the Act of Union, will all at once, allay this fury; or that it will have the power of a charm or talisman: no, Sir, but the force of England is wanted to restrain the violence of party, and to give time for the revival of better passions—to give time for the effects of knowledge and of encreasing property. Without knowledge and property, a Legislator here, or a Legislator there, has

has nothing to act upon. How many, Sir, of the acts on your table are a dead letter?—It is not in the power of acts of Parliament, suddenly to reform or enlighten a nation. It is said that this must be a military government for many years—this is a wretched necessity—to lay it to the fault of any government, any Parliament or any party is equally idle. It arises from the circumstances of the times and of the country; circumstances which cannot be instantaneously changed. We have not been able to keep the peace amongst ourselves; we have called in England to our aid, to settle our domestic quarrels.—

When the horse in his quarrel with the boar, called in the man to his assistance, the horse was ever afterwards obliged to submit to the bridle.—Sir, dependence was ever in proportion to protection. So long as the property of this country requires protection from Great Britain, we cannot be independent; we must either become united amongst ourselves, or legislatively united to Great Britain. If ever there was a moment when Ireland could call herself independent, it was when the Washington of Ireland collected round him the property and virtue of Ireland, when the influence of his exalted character united all parties—lulled to sleep the fury of religious dissention—forgave the neglect of England—and bid defiance to the power of France. At that moment if independence were really

really desirable, which I am very far from thinking, perhaps it might have been obtained. An armed neutrality might have protected the commerce of all the world.—The value of the English navy equipped for sea, does not much exceed the debt which Ireland has incurred since that period.—But, Sir, this high-sounding phrase of independence is not worth the consideration of a moment. The two Islands are mutually dependent—so are the earth and moon; they mutually regulate and enlighten each other; but, Sir, they move round one common centre of gravity, which is extraneous to both of them.

It is asked how an Union will promote a better spirit between the contending parties in this kingdom? I will tell you how;—By shutting out all hope of supremacy on the one hand, and by allaying all fear of it on the other.

A pamphlet which appeared at the commencement of last session, has been ridiculed and vilified for having promised advantages both to Catholics and Protestants. The author has been compared to an actor, who speaks aside upon the stage, assuming from the courtesy of the theatre, the privilege of being heard by those only, whom he wishes to address; on the contrary, he appears to be more like the ancient Chorus who told truths to all parties, without partiality or disguise.

disguise. Sir, nothing can be more true, than that both parties would gain inestimable advantages from any measure that should prevent, or even smother their internal jealousies, till time should utterly extinguish them.—Neither the wisdom of the Irish Parliament, nor of the English Minister, nor of the joint Parliaments, can allay religious animosity. We must wait for an encrease of knowledge. All that can be done by human wisdom, is to prevent actual warfare. When the feeling of real injury, and the language of provocation and defiance cease, reason will resume its seat; time and the view of what passes in the rest of the world; new pursuits; good example and good education, will carry off, or prevent the peccant humours that diseased the country.

During our own time, Sir, all we can hope for—and is it little? All we can hope for is security—the first object, the great end of every social compact. To compensate all the enjoyments of uncontrouled liberty, all the natural pride of perfect independence, civilized man accepts public protection, as a pledge for private security; without it, we may hope in vain to enjoy that sweet peace which *poets say*, “the good man bosoms ever.”

Sir, without an armed force at their command, when the rebellion is put down, when invasion

is as little to be apprehended as at any moment since the commencement of the war, the post cannot travel without a guard, and no gentleman who resides in the country, can go to sleep without examining the maffy bars and bolts, which he has provided againft his—*neighbours*.

This is a ftate of life which cannot long be endured. The Englifh Minifter cheers us with the fmiling hope of being able to continue the war for eight years longer. What man of common prudence will be content to live in prifon for eight years, to obtain doubtful advantages for his pofterity. If an Union can keep down religious difcord, we may be upon a footing with Great Britain—we can bear with them the burthen of a foreign war, when we are delivered from the apprehenfion of domeftic enemies.

But, Sir, whilft I thus give my sentiments in favour of an Union, they are far from being in favour of the plan of Union, now laid before us.—Unless an Union leaves nothing behind it which can become a ground of jealousy, or altercation, we had better remain as we are at prefent. To ftrengthen the two countries by an Union, their interefts muft be compleatly identified—their debts, taxes, commercial advantages and reftraints, their current coin, every thing which

which can be the object of Legislative exertion, must be upon a perfect footing of equality.

I know, Sir, that a Minister could not at once venture to propose such a bold and sweeping measure ;—but, Sir, he talks to you of our being equal to such a situation, in fifteen or twenty years.

The debt of England, the noble Lord has stated, as bearing, at the commencement of the war, a proportion to the debt of Ireland, as one hundred and twenty to one—at present, as thirteen to one—he therefore justly concludes, that in a short time, the debt of the two kingdoms must be exactly proportioned to their relative strength, riches, and population. He might put this in a much stronger light—in ten years since 1788, a period partly of peace and partly of war ; the debt of Ireland has encreased in a decuple proportion—in ten years more, were our debt to follow the same proportion, it would amount to two hundred millions, and in twenty to two thousand millions.—There must therefore, Sir, be some fallacy in the common modes of calculation upon these subjects ; direct induction in finance, frequently leads to absurdity. In fact, Sir, those who are in the least conversant with subjects of this nature, must perceive, that if the debt of England were instantly extinguished, it would create universal bankruptcy and confu-

tion. Sir, a sudden and violent increase of pressure from the atmosphere, would crush us to pieces, and were its present pressure suddenly removed, we should burst asunder from internal expansion; but, Sir, if a fair Union between the two countries can ever be established, it must be upon such terms as leave no temptation on the one side, and no suspicion on the other.

Upon any other occasion I would spare myself the mortification which necessarily attends what is thought to be a paradox; but I will, however, venture to assert, that this country at present, actually pays a very large share of the national debt of Great Britain, and I will go farther, that I may have an opportunity of stating publicly, what cannot long continue paradoxical. The debt of England gradually ceases to be a burthen, and *after certain periods of time*, every addition to it becomes merely numerical, and encumbers neither the exertions of the state nor the industry of individuals.

Sir W. Davenant in King William's time, with all the enthusiasm not of a common prophet, but of a calculating prophet, fixed the precise sum of national debt, at which bankruptcy must ensue. Many subsequent prophets have been equally mistaken, and I believe that even Lord North when pressed upon the subject, was compelled

pelled to fix five hundred million, as an amount beyond which there was no possibility of upholding credit. I say five hundred million, but I am rather inclined to think it was but four,

This is not a time, Sir, to enter into discussions of this sort, but in justice to myself, I have barely mentioned the general opinions, upon which I found my assertion, that perfect equality of every sort must subsist before a just Union can be established.

I shall take up, Sir, but a very few moments more of your time, in stating how far the general consent of the nation should be considered, in bringing this measure to a conclusion.

I have formerly laid it down as a principle, that there are two species of majorities in these countries where our Constitutions are founded upon representation. Wherever these coincide, there can be no doubt as to the sense of the nation. Numbers without property should, in some few cases, be chiefly looked to, as for instance, in a poll tax; in more cases, the preponderating weight of property should decide; but where the weight of property is *nearly* balanced, there it appears to me that the majority of Numbers should be thrown into the scale to turn the beam. I say, where property on either side, is

nearly balanced, Numbers should be taken into consideration;—but where the decided sense of the people can be ascertained, I hold it to be the duty of a trustee, to abstain from any definitive treaty that is contrary to their opinion. If the measure appear to him useful or necessary, let him *yield* for the present to the voice of the people, which has poetically been called the voice of God; that is to say, where a whole nation raises its voice against any act of Government, it may be concluded that common sense decides against it.

If I could be informed by any impartial evidence, or by my own observation, that the common sense of this kingdom, was against a Legislative Union, my tongue never should utter a vote in its favour.

I shall therefore, Sir, always hold myself unshackled, and at liberty, upon this subject, and no weak fear of having my conduct censured as unstable and easily to be turned by every wind of doctrine, shall for a moment deter me from giving my ultimate dissent from their measure, if any of the terms, or if a new view of the whole of the subject should alter my opinion.—To some gentlemen, this declaration may appear extraordinary—they may have found by experience that a man must join a party, if he mean
either

either to obtain pre-eminence or to serve his country, and I admit this to be true in ordinary cases, but in an extreme case like the present, ordinary maxims of prudence must be laid aside. I am here contending *pro aris et focis*. It is a question in which the security of my property and the dearest interests of my family are concerned, and, Sir, he is no bad patriot who begins from the centre of the social circle, and who gradually extends his views to the circumference. French philanthropists follow the phantom of universal benevolence as their guide, and, becoming abstract citizens, are neither husbands, fathers, nor children; they are all brothers, without any distinction of primogeniture. Now, Sir, in these countries, we are contented to believe that the state which contains the greatest number of good husbands, fathers, children, landlords, and masters, will probably contain the largest brotherhood of good citizens.

On this occasion, Sir, perhaps the last in which my voice can ever be heard in public, I shall not court the protection or encouragement of any party. I shall be guided in every step of this business, not by any preconceived theory, but by the practical judgment which I may form from every source of information within and without these walls. But, Sir, my present vote has been determined chiefly by one circumstance, which

renders it impossible for me to contribute to the establishment of the system now proposed to us. The Minister has avowed that seventy boroughs in this kingdom are saleable commodities; that he intends to purchase them with the public money; and he openly tells you that the price is *fixed*. Sir, when I heard a Minister in England, in the dispute upon the regency, avow that he would not be Minister, without having the Lords of the Bedchamber at his disposal, I was astonished at the hardness of the assertion, but when we are told that seventy boroughs of this kingdom, whose members are now amongst us, are to be purchased at 15,000*l.* a piece, it is impossible to collect the genuine sense of the nation within these walls. Sir, that influence exists instead of prerogative, we all admit, but to tear the veil from the shocking idol of corruption, and to command us to worship it in all its indecent and disgusting nakedness, is a species of profligacy that takes away the zest of refinement from debauchery. There are actions which all the world perform, but *Democritus* alone despised his species sufficiently to perform them publicly. Whilst this corruption is part of the proposal for a Legislative Union, I will oppose it; and till I believe, from my own observation and my own judgment, that the sense of the sober and impartial majority of this nation is in favour of the measure, notwithstanding my own opinion is in favour of an Union, I shall vote against it.

SPEECH

SPEECH II.

*In the Debate on Mr. Ponsonby's Resolutions, in
the House of Commons, on Tuesday, March 4,
1800.*

“ Resolved, That it is a constitutional exercise of the Rights of the Subject, to Petition this House, on any measure pending therein.

“ Resolved, That it appears that Petitions have been presented, during this Session, from twenty-six counties, together with Petitions from various cities, towns, &c. against the measure of a Legislative Union.

“ Resolved, That these Resolutions be laid before his Excellency, the Lord Lieutenant, together with an humble Address, praying that he may transmit the same, to be laid before his most gracious Majesty.”

I FEEL, Sir, particular satisfaction in rising to second and support the motion before the House. I am glad of an opportunity to express my determined opposition to the attempts which are made to force the measure of a Legislative Union upon this

this country, while at the same time I wish that the opinion of the country was favourable to such an Union, because I think it would be ultimately beneficial. I give my support to this motion, with wishes, perhaps, very different from those of some other gentlemen who supported it. I wish that it might give rise to such an enquiry as would shew the sense of the people to be in favour of an Union, and the noble Lord had in part of his speech given me hopes, that he would put the question fairly upon this issue; he had, however, explained himself in such a manner as to take away all reliance upon hopes of this nature, and had left it to be ascertained whether the declarations which his Lordship had been pleased to call the addresses obtained by Government last summer; or the petitions from twenty-six counties, from Dublin, and from other respectable towns and cities, contained the real sense of the nation. His Lordship had indeed asserted, upon his honour, that he believed that the sense of the country is in favour of the measure. This is a test of his Lordship's sentiments that no man will controvert; but as it is as becoming in me to be guided by my own opinion, as to the fact in question, as it was in the noble Lord, I also will declare, upon my honour, that if I could be convinced that the property and the good sense of the nation were with the noble Lord, I would instantly walk across the House
and

and give my whole attention to assist in rectifying whatever defects I think the specific plan before them might contain; for these I think there might be present remedies, but for the general aversion which was expressed against the measure I see no effectual remedy but time.

His Lordship had said, that the people knew no more of forming an Union than of the Philosopher's Stone. His Lordship, however, seemed to be an adept in both, and to have the address to make each of them subservient to the other.

In fact, to determine the genuine opinion of a nation was not such an easy or simple problem as even his Lordship had supposed. "*Qu'est ce que c'est que le Tiers Etat*," was the title of a pamphlet, by which the Abbe Sieyes contributed not a little to the downfall of the French monarchy. This subject, at the commencement of the French Revolution, was new in France. They had divided the nation in their States General into three orders; the Clergy, the Nobles, and the Third Estate, which comprehended whatever was not contained in the two other classes. In Great-Britain and Ireland, we knew better how to ascertain what was denoted by "the People." No person was now so foolish as to suppose, that every man in the State was equally capable of determining what might be the result of a Legislative

tive Union. From the events that had passed before our eyes, all descriptions of men had learned something: the higher classes had, perhaps, learned, that Greek and Roman liberty was not the species of liberty which ought to be the object of our enthusiastic admiration. We no longer heard pompous declamations from the classics, and this I think is an improvement upon the current notions of mankind. Liberty now meant something more than a name, and every man knew that it did not mean democracy.

Sir, it is impossible for the Noble Lord to mistake what had been advanced by his learned friend, with respect to the sense of the people: it never was asserted that every man in the nation had an equal right to decide upon this question: property, ability, information and experience, conferred different degrees of consequence upon various individuals. Again, commercial property differed from landed property, as to the interest which it gave to different classes of men in the community. The capital of commerce might by degrees be transferred to another country without any great loss; but property in land, from settlements and from other causes, was far more permanent; in some cases it could not be transferred, and in all cases it is liable to suffer from changes of Government, and to be totally alienated by civil war. All these different interests, in such a state as

our's, require adjustment; and the sense of the nation cannot be determined without comparing and assigning to each of them their just value—to do this by any precise rule or measure might be impossible, but in every county of the kingdom, the opinions of men both of commercial and landed property may be ascertained; the influence of abilities in private conversation and in public discussion will be felt, and the lower orders will arrange themselves under their superiors, as their interests and wishes may direct. Gentlemen may thus, if proper opportunities are allowed to them, determine what the sense of their respective counties may be, and in stating their opinions upon the result, the character, and sense, and candour of every individual in the House will give proportionable weight to his representation.

The kingdom at large will echo or deny what is stated to the House, and if any decided general opinion pervades the kingdom it cannot be stifled or overborne; in one word, the opinion of the country must be valued by weight and not by number, and must be weighed by no common scales—the specific not the absolute preponderance must prevail.

The Noble Lord last session promised that he would not bring this measure before the House, till it became the wish of the people. During the recess,

recess, the Executive Government took great pains to *inform* the people what they *ought* to wish—and having persuaded his Majesty that the eyes of the nation were now open to the beauty of the prospect, which an Union offered to their view, the speech of his Excellency again invited this House to re-assume its deliberations upon the subject as it now came before them, recommended by addressees or declarations from every part of the kingdom.—For my part, Sir, till I came to town, I had been persuaded that this representation from the Lord Lieutenant was unquestionable. I was, however, soon undeceived, by the numerous petitions, which were heaped upon the table. For the moment the county Members on the left of the Chair knew that the sense of the nation was stated to be against them, they enquired into the fact, and found it otherwise. Certainly in some cases, the sense of a county depended upon the swiftness of the horses, which were ridden by the contending parties—in one county I know, that had not an honourable Member, who was usually in the *wake* of the Noble Lord, been distanced by a more able horseman of another House of Parliament, it would have been a moot point on which side the greatest numbers might have been found. Galloping for signatures was not the method to ascertain the sober sense of the kingdom; let the noble Lord give fair opportunity to determine this point, and
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if it be decided in favour of the measure, all difficulty will vanish.—But if he persist to force it upon the people, and to evade all means of laying the truth before our Sovereign, the consequences might be such as no repentance could remedy—such as might blast the fair fame which the young Nobleman had acquired at such an early age, and might plunge ourselves and our posterity into a situation in which the worst evils might arise from the best principles of the human mind. Were two-thirds of this Parliament to be turned adrift against the consent of the nation, and were any great calamity to weaken Great Britain—were a hurricane to destroy its fleet, or a famine desolate its people, the inhabitants of this kingdom might unfortunately consider themselves free from obligation to support a compact which had been forced upon the nation, and they might madly call upon that portion of their Parliament which had been disbanded, to resume its functions.

I deprecate such a fatal catastrophe, and protest against ever submitting to such an injunction against what might be the existing laws of my country;—perhaps others might think their duty imposed upon them a different conduct. I conjure the Noble Lord to take the safest part, and to let the sense of the kingdom be honestly collected. An Union, were it fully submitted to, would
produce

produce none of those vivifying consequences which were expected by its supporters—there could be no friendly intercourse—no commercial confidence—no partnerships in trade—no speculations by English opulence upon Irish adventure—in short, another age of distrust must pass away before either country could enjoy the advantages which were proposed to them. It is possible by force to mix the most heterogeneous materials; oil and water may be mechanically combined, but they soon separate; the real Union of different materials can alone be effected by the mutual attraction of their respective parts; when these parts have once combined they become one body without danger of spontaneous dissolution.

I shall conclude, Sir, by saying, that I shall vote against the question of adjournment, and for the motion of Mr. Ponsonby.

SPEECH

SPEECH III.

In the Debate in the House of Commons, March 21, 1800, on Mr. Annesley's Motion: That the Report of the Committee which had taken his Excellency's Message into Consideration might then be received.

I RISE, Sir, to take this last opportunity of giving my opinion upon some of the Resolutions which passed the Committee upon a former night with very little animadversion. I am sensible that I shall trespass upon gentlemen who had hoped to get to dinner at an early hour, and I am persuaded of the truth of Cardinal de Retz's observation, that the business and temper of large assemblies often depended more upon the hour of dinner than upon those sublime motives, which are commonly supposed to influence mankind. But notwithstanding that the hour is inauspicious, I shall claim that portion of time which justly belongs to me—nearly three hundred hours have passed in the discussion of the question of Union, and as I have not yet taken up one three-hundreth part of that time, I fairly step forward to “strut my short hour on the stage.”

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The first object which strikes me, in considering the Resolution relative to Representation—is its want of unity of design. I have looked in vain for some internal vital principle, which might nourish and sustain the whole, and which by being diffused through all its members might actuate the whole body.—I have in vain endeavoured to find some clue, to lead me through the windings of this political labyrinth—Far from unity of design, this plan seems to *affect* variety, and no part of the Legislative Body escapes its love of innovation. Not content with endeavouring to unite what is discordant, this project endeavours to separate what has for years been united. Why should the Spiritual Lords have a mode of representation different from that of the Lords Temporal? Four Bishops are to sit in the British Parliament by rotation of sessions—Twenty-eight Lay Peers are to take their seats for life.—Yet the Constitution admits of no distinction between the Spiritual and Temporal Peers of Parliament.

Ever since the Norman conquest the Spiritual Lords with many Abbots always sat in Parliament to represent certain feudal baronies—Henry VIII. at the Reformation struck off the Abbots with his disfranchising hand from the roll of Parliament, but this made no change in the Parliament. Nor does the Constitution know any difference between Spiritual and Temporal Peers. Lord Coke

Coke expressly gives this as his opinion, and cites as an instance in support of it, the Act of Uniformity, which in the first of Queen Elizabeth passed the House of Lords, though none of the Spiritual Lords voted for the bill; but the Act of Uniformity was never questioned upon this account, nor did the Bishops prefer any claims to any powers or privileges distinct from those of their lay brethren.

Though no constitutional cause can be assigned for the difference made by the Noble Lord between our Spiritual and Temporal Peers; there was, an obvious ministerial necessity for this measure. Some of our Temporal Peers are possessed of extensive landed property, and consequently of unquestionable influence over the constituents of counties, and as to boroughs who doubts their consequence to the Minister? Without their assistance in the country, addresses in favour of an Union could not be procured, and without their votes in the House of Peers the measure could not be effected. Amongst our Bishops there is not so great an equality of power and influence as amongst their lay brethren. Hence the reason why twenty-eight of our Temporal Peers are to enjoy their seats for life.

I suppose, Sir, that the Minister prescribes for our Bishops the salutary evacuation of frequent sea voyages, and the exercise of septennial jour-

nies over the rugged Welch mountains, to prevent diseases of repletion, and to counteract the effects of that high living, in which the dignitaries of the church are supposed by the vulgar to indulge.

But I cannot help here paying a just tribute of praise to the Irish Bishops, who displayed, when I had occasion to consult them on my Bill for the education of the people, as much liberality, in the best sense of the word, as any body of men in the kingdom.

I shall now, Sir, call your attention to that part of the Minister's plan, which relates to the Lords Temporal, and I cannot help expressing much astonishment at the Noble Lord's attack upon the Royal Prerogative. The King, by the British Constitution, is considered as the fountain of honour, but the Minister, afraid that the stream should flow too bountifully amongst his Majesty's Irish subjects, limits its course and says, "so far shalt thou go, and no farther." If this plan be carried into effect, his Majesty is not to have it in his power to encrease the Irish Peerage beyond its present number. His Majesty's feelings must be yet more hurt by the necessity to which he is reduced of depreciating his past gifts, and of keeping the Royal "word of promise only to the ear." Irish Peerages have been graciously bestowed upon some of his Majesty's subjects.

as rewards for essential services—upon others, doubtless upon equally valuable considerations, but I ask whether any of these gentlemen, when they kissed the Royal Hand, foresaw that they should afterwards, without any disloyal or unbecoming conduct on their parts, be degraded and deprived of their right to sit in Parliament?

I lament the deplorable condition to which these Irish Peers will now be reduced, who will have no privilege or occupation left, but that of disputing a question of rank for themselves or their ladies at a ball or a birth night.—This plan is not only destructive of their personal consequence, but of the hopes and emulation of their children. At present it is an honourable object to the sons of Peers to distinguish themselves in our House of Commons; but henceforward they are to be excluded from all opportunities of exerting their abilities in the service of their country. We have seen in this House talents unfolding themselves, which would never have been displayed without a proper field for their exertion. The Noble Lord himself, is a splendid example of what the young nobility of Ireland might become, if their early talents were matured by the business of Parliament. But as I perceive that his Lordship has paid no attention to my last sentence, I find that his feelings have been so deadened by the voice of Flattery, that honest praise cannot reach his heart.

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But supposing our young nobility, to be insensible to the desire of distinguishing themselves, or of serving their country by their Parliamentary talents, yet they must feel the change in their situation as mere men of the world. The ladies will look down upon them as Lords by courtesy, and to become Ladyships by courtesy will not in the estimation of the fair, who are sometimes nice, and accurate appraisers of honours, be considered as an enviable privilege. I cannot put the matter in a stronger light than by observing, that formerly an English Commoner might be gratified by being made an Irish Peer; but now, an Irish Peer may be gratified by being made an English Commoner. I am much astonished, that the Peers of this kingdom could be brought to accept of the terms offered to them.—But, doubtless an Irish Peer will give up every thing for the good of his country. It is said, that the Peerage is attracted naturally by the Crown—on the contrary, it seems that the moment the Peers are let loose from one another, and left to themselves, they are attracted downwards to the people from whom they sprung, and that the greatest number of them gravitate towards the level of the Commons.—Those, indeed, who have received the true magnetic touch, turn trembling with anxious polarity to the Crown.

The Noble Lord, has continually attributed Jacobinism to those who have opposed him. Perhaps

haps newly made Peers, taught by Joel Barlow, are persuaded that a title is a childish bauble, and like children, are as ready to give it up as they were eager to obtain it. No! Sir, I cannot seriously suppose that the Nobles of Ireland are insensible to the advantages that must result to a free State from the distinctions of rank.—It is incumbent upon Legislators to preserve in the minds of the people respect for these distinctions; but this cannot be done, if the privileges of rank, which are supposed to be unalienable, are at the mercy of a minister. Our nobility have entrusted the Minister with their family honours, like valuable jewels to be newly set: to some he has given more than belonged to them, whilst to others he has given only counterfeit stones.

I had hoped, Sir, when I first heard an Union proposed, that some degree of parliamentary reform might be the consequence of the measure—I had flattered myself that a hundred free members from Ireland would have infused fresh spirit into the English House of Commons—I had imagined that some of the youthful blood of Ireland was to be poured into the exhausted veins of England to renovate her Constitution, but I now perceive, that one mass of corruption is to be added to another—that whilst our ancient rights and privileges are invaded, without regard to precedent of any sort, we are not to expect as an equivalent any essential national benefit—We are to have

alterations without improvements, and change without reform. By the present plan the commerce of Ireland will not be represented in the British Parliament—many of our commercial towns and cities are at present mere boroughs in the power of the Aristocracy, and there is little probability of their being filled by men peculiarly skilled in mercantile concerns. Boroughs, we all know, were originally intended to afford the mercantile part of the kingdom a share in the Legislation, but their destination has been utterly changed. Now is the proper time to reform this abuse. Since we are making alterations, I cannot apprehend that it would create more difficulty or disturbance to alter for the better, than to alter for the worse—Many of the rotten boroughs will be lopped off, the closed boroughs of our great towns and cities might be thrown open, and then we should not have to complain that our Aristocracy has an undue, and our Commerce an inadequate representation.

But, if all ideas of reform are to be treated as visionary, or in ministerial language, as “*inexpedient in the existing circumstances*,” let us follow the Noble Lord upon his own ground. I would propose that the plan of rotation for the Spiritual Lords should be extended not only to the Lords Temporal, but also to the Commons. That one-third of seventy-two county and city members, should go in rotation along with one-third of the
remainder

remainder of the Irish House. Amongst the advantages of this scheme of rotation, there would constantly be a *succession* of Irish Gentlemen in the United Parliament, and this would much encrease that intercourse which was supposed to be so beneficial to the country.

It has been asserted, that the Scotch members are listed under the British Minister—but if the Irish Representatives were sent by rotation, it would be impossible to regiment such a fluctuating body of men under ministerial influence. I do not mention this to recommend the plan to the Minister, but to recommend it to this country. Were our representatives to return to us every year they would, by touching their mother earth, acquire fresh vigour to resist the Herculean influence of a British Minister.—The Irish Members who were in abeyance might perhaps be employed in the trials of contested elections. A plan might be devised for this purpose, which would prevent the monstrous absurdities of the present scheme, and put it out of the power of a British Minister to employ the whole Irish Legislation in settling contested elections, and by this means to keep them either at home or upon the road.

Doubtless many objections might be made to this scheme of rotation, but these would all be overbalanced by its preventing the necessity for
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what the Minister calls compensation.—The idea of compensation I reprobate in the strongest terms. There is something shameful and monstrous, in the manner in which the venality of our boroughs has been avowed.—I at first thought that this avowal had been an egregious blunder; but perhaps it was necessary to the Minister to secure some of those wary veteran troops which he has brought into the field.—When Parliament is pledged to the bargain all will be safe. Alas, Mr. Speaker, your eyes, like those of Eneas, at the destruction of Troy, are opened, and you behold the irresistible powers which sap the foundations of our Constitution.

I am shocked at the composure with which the Noble Lord talked of compensation—of that which should have been “*a deed without a name.*” The legions of corruption, who till now shrunk from the light, are dragged into public view, and in open day they are named, numbered, registered, paid, and enlisted in the service of the Minister.—The Noble Lord himself comes forward, and tells us that there are under his banners one hundred and thirty borough members.—There is surely something disgusting in this disregard to our feelings. The profligacy which is masked by decency is somewhat more tolerable than that which braves public opinion. One stage of corruption is attended by a perfume, which may be agreeable to some gentlemen’s
olfactory

olfactory nerves, but the stench indicative of absolute putrefaction must be offensive to the grossest organs.

I cannot help here adverting to a transaction well known in England, relative to the borough of Shaftsbury. But a very few years ago the most abandoned petty-fogging attorney managing an election in a venal borough, in a corner of the sister kingdom, dared not avow that corruption which the present Minister of the Crown blazons with unblushing front in an Irish House of Commons. The borough of Shaftsbury was disfranchised for corruption, yet that corruption was carefully concealed, and when it was at length brought to light, it shocked the public more than could have been suspected from their knowledge of Parliamentary impurity:—a club was formed for the express purpose of buying and selling the votes of the constituents of the borough, and that names might not be wanting to the sin, they called it “*The Christian Club* :” during the time of election a species of puppet-show was constructed in a petty ale-house, in which a figure of Punch was exhibited, who in the midst of his usual antics, was made to offer a purse to such visitors as were known to have an interest in the election; persons out of doors asked those whom they wanted to seduce, “Whether they had seen *the Dancing Punch* ?”—if they had not, they were presented with a ticket, and were always observed to re-
turn

turn highly satisfied with the entertainment. No such ingenuity of subterfuge is even attempted here—a Noble Lord in his own proper person, not only proposes to purchase seventy-two boroughs; but to make the people themselves pay the price of their own disfranchisement.—All this confirms the people in the dangerous notion, that what is criminal in detail is laudable in wholesale, and that bribery, fraud, and robbery are justifiable, when exercised upon a large scale, and upon a great theatre. What, Sir, has been the object of election laws?—To prevent bribery and corruption. A county Member may lose his seat, if it can be proved that he has given a bottle of wine or a beefsteak to a hungry elector—but if “an hundred oxen roar at the levee” of a Noble borough-monger, it would not in these degenerate days spoil his slumbers. We are arrived at a happy liberty of conscience and liberty of speech. It is no longer unconstitutional to talk of buying seats in Parliament. The bargain may now be struck in the public market-place, or in his Majesty’s Court of Exchequer, or in the House of Commons itself, before the Speaker, with the mace upon the table, whilst he is administering the oaths to a new Member.

Sir, you ought to send me to Newgate for daring to say, that within this fortnight I was offered three thousand guineas for my seat in Parliament. If you do, Sir, I shall go in good company—for
you

you must send him along with me, who has bid within these walls, one million and a half for the boroughs of Ireland. The extent of the evil will not be limited by the duration of the Irish Parliament. The example will remain, and will be imitated with eagerness.—Those beneath us, however incapable some may think them of imitating our virtues, are apt scholars when we teach them vice or folly. I have known, a forty-shilling freeholder, who sold a pair of plated buckles for ten guineas, hooted at by every man of his own rank in the neighbourhood. I have known a starving weaver to pick up a purse of gold dropped before him by a reverend agent, and return it with indignant honesty to the shameful hands which threw it in his way. Can this, Sir, be the case hereafter? What can prevent the corruption of county electors? I think, Sir, the county of Louth, which you represent, registers four hundred and fifty freeholders. To prevent your talents, Mr. Speaker—to prevent your invaluable information, and your attachment to your country from being troublesome in Great Britain, a less sum than the purchase of a borough would be sufficient.

Sir, this precedent for open corruption, this avowed application of the public money, for the purchase of what no man has a right to sell, this acknowledgment in the face of Parliament that seventy-two boroughs are venal in this kingdom, impeaches

impeaches the authority of Parliament itself, and teaches us that it is employed only because it is a more powerful engine than simple despotism. This irreverend insult upon the dignity of Parliament cannot be employed by the enemies of limited Monarchy—for the good sense of the English nation has saved it from all danger of republican revolution—but the unsuspicious nature of the same generous people, does not permit them to foresee what advantage may be taken of their confidence, by those who prefer unlimited monarchy. Has not Lord Cornwallis refused to employ martial law under a bill of indemnity, that he might have an occasion to employ the sanction of Parliamentary forms to suspend the Constitution? Are not the forms of Parliament employed without disguise to destroy the Parliament itself? Is not the majority by whom this law is to be enacted, obtained in a Parliament, for whose borough representation a million and a half is to be paid? Are not troops stationed in every part of this kingdom to enforce what will formally be law, but what can never be substantially legal, till it has been sanctioned by time and acquiescence? In fact this is the sanction on which those who support the measure secretly rely.—Bonaparte relies upon this sanction, and it is more probable that his usurpation will be confirmed by the French Nation, than that the Irish should ultimately submit to the usurpation of the British Minister. A learned gentleman has

has lately stated the constitutional doctrine of resistance, and the Noble Lord has dared him to "*stand forward like a man*," at the head of the people, and oppose force to force. In the first place, the word People has been carefully defined to the exclusion of the mere populace who are without property, responsibility, or knowledge. In the next place, it partakes more of the nature of bullying than of courage, to defy a man to head numbers without arms or military stores, against an army of sixty or eighty thousand men, trained, officered, and appointed.—No, Sir, it would better become the Noble Lord himself to *stand forward like a man*, and to put himself at the head of the troops and fairly conquer the kingdom; then he may with some shew of right—the right of conquest—impose what laws he pleases on the vanquished, and then they may submit without degradation. But if he thinks that time, and what he hopes may be necessity, will reconcile his Majesty's subjects to his Minister's oppression, he will be deceived—the fire may be smothered in its ashes, but the same wind that bears away the English troops, or that wafts an invading army to these coasts, will blow up the embers of Discontent into a flame, which may, perhaps, destroy both countries before it can be quenched.

I declare, Sir, that from the progress of this business I cannot help suspecting, that to persuade

suade this nation to a Union would not be quite so congenial to the views of the British Minister as to compel us to submit to it—I cannot help suspecting that this is an experiment upon a limb of the British Empire, to try whether the whole body can bear, the violence of such measures—when Madame de Brinvillier had formed the horrid design of poisoning the chief nobility of France, she tried her potions upon meaner subjects, to ascertain the dose that might be effectual.

But, Sir, I must here pause, to beg pardon of the House for transgressing that moderation which I have always wished to preserve. I am still ready to support, *with the consent of the nation, an Union which should identify this kingdom with Great Britain*; but the indignation which I feel at the avowal of fraud and force to subjugate my country, makes the fire of youth glow beneath my grey hairs. If this usurpation be triumphant I will quit this country, to which I have devoted half my life; and if Great Britain, the foremost country in the world, be doomed to share the same fate, and to be subjugated by the forms of Parliament and the force of standing armies, I will fly yet farther, nor will I ever breathe any air but that of freedom.

FINIS.

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